

Physical Activity and the Health of Young People

Fact Sheet

BENEFITS OF REGULAR PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

- Helps build and maintain healthy bones and muscles.¹
- Helps control weight, build lean muscle, and reduce fat.¹
- Reduces feelings of depression and anxiety and promotes psychological well-being.¹

LONG-TERM CONSEQUENCES OF PHYSICAL INACTIVITY

- Physical inactivity and poor diet together account for at least 300,000 deaths in the United States each year. Only tobacco use contributes to more preventable deaths.²
- Physical inactivity increases the risk of dying prematurely, dying of heart disease, and developing diabetes, colon cancer, and high blood pressure.¹

OVERWEIGHT AND OBESITY

- In 1988–1994, approximately 11% of children and adolescents (ages 6–17) were overweight — up from approximately 5% in the 1960s and 1970s.³
- Obese children and adolescents are more likely to become obese adults;^{4,5} overweight adults are at increased risk for heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke, diabetes, some types of cancer, and gallbladder disease.⁶

PARTICIPATION IN PHYSICAL ACTIVITY BY YOUNG PEOPLE

- Nearly half of young people aged 12–21 years do not regularly engage in vigorous physical activity.⁷
- Sixty five percent of high school students participate in vigorous physical activity on 3 or more days a week, and 27% participate in moderate physical activity on 5 or more days a week.⁸
- Participation in physical activity declines as children get older.
 - ▶ Regular participation in vigorous physical activity has been reported by 69% of young people aged 12–13 years but only 38% of those aged 18–21.⁷
 - ▶ Seventy-three percent of 9th graders but only 61% of 12th graders participate in vigorous physical activity on a regular basis.⁸



Percentage of High School Students Participating in Different Types of Physical Activity, by Sex, 1999⁸

Type of Activity	Girls	Boys
Vigorous physical activity ^a	57%	72%
Moderate physical activity ^b	24%	29%
Strengthening exercises ^c	44%	64%
Played on sports teams ^d	49%	62%

^aActivities that caused sweating and hard breathing for 20 minutes or more on at least 3 of the 7 days preceding the survey.
^bActivities that did not cause sweating or hard breathing for 30 minutes or more on at least 5 of the 7 days preceding the survey.
^cFor example, push-ups, sit-ups, or weightlifting on at least 3 of the 7 days preceding the survey.
^dDuring the 12 months preceding the survey.

PARTICIPATION IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION CLASS

- Fifty-six percent of U.S. high school students (79% of 9th graders but only 37% of 12th graders) were enrolled in a physical education class in 1999.⁸
- The percentage of students who attended a daily physical education class dropped from 42% in 1991 to 29% in 1999;⁸ in 1999, 42% of 9th graders but only 20% of 12th graders attended a daily physical education class.⁸
- Of students enrolled in physical education classes in 1999, 24% reported that they did not exercise for 20 or more minutes in an average physical education class.⁸

References

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